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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether multicultural literature used within the classroom increases respect for differences among kindergarten children. Subjects for the study were 12 students ranging in age from 5-6 years old from two classrooms. Ethnic breakdown of the subjects was four Black students (two boys, two girls), four Hispanic students (two boys, two girls), two Asian students (one boy, one girl), and two Caucasian students (one boy, one girl). The book "Amazing Grace" was read to the experimental group. Discussions were lively. Results indicated that gender stereotypes seemed to be somewhat of a problem, but obvious ethnic biases were not found. Findings suggest that longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine if multicultural literature is an effective tool in the fight to increase respect for differences. Since several books in the classroom collection may promote gender stereotypes, a criteria for book selection needs to be developed and implemented within the classroom, district, and state. More work in the area of decreasing gender bias needs to be developed. (Contains a 7-item bibliography. Interview questions for students and response sheet, as well as a graph breaking down students, are attached.) (CR)

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BOOKWISE AND CULTURE SMART

1998

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Multicultural education's justification for inclusion into the school curriculum is not grounded in empirical demonstration of the effects of such materials on student behavior and attitudes, but rather on two other important grounds: (a) the need for historical accuracy and (b) the national commitment to a democratic society" (Myrdal, with Sterner & Rose, 1994, as cited in Banks, 1995, p 617). Multicultural education also meshes with the California Department of Education's emphasis on historical literacy under the goal of knowledge and cultural understanding in the 1997 Social Studies Framework. Throughout the grade levels students are expected to do the following: "develop a keen sense of historical empathy, understand the meaning of time chronology, analyze cause and effect, understand the reasons for continuity and change, recognize as history common memory, with political implications, and lastly understand the importance of religion, philosophy, and other major belief systems in history" (1997,p12-13). Multicultural Education is multifaceted and has no one true definition. According to Banks (1995) "Sleeter and Grant noted a lack of consensus in the field and concluded that the focus on people of color was the only common element among the different definitions of multicultural education".

There is no one definition that describes multicultural education in its totality. According to Tiedt multicultural education has been a source of controversy and confusion. Defined geographically, it has led to studies of other countries and the concept of the earth as a global village. Focus on ethnic studies has brought an awareness of literature and folklore specific to groups that speak the same language or share a religious belief" (1990, p 3). Even the literature to be used is a great source of controversy. Larrick (1965) studied the African American's presence in literature during 1962 - 1964 and found that only 6.7% of books had Black characters in the illustrations of text, and that only 0.9% actually showed them in contemporary settings

(as cited in Yokota, 1993). Children's literature was looked at again recently by Rollock (1984) for the inclusion of African Americans and found that "overall the number of books including Black characters had increased, but between the 1979 - 1984 only 1.5% of the newly published books contained Blacks" (as cited in Yokota, 1993, p 157). Yokota (1993) also states that if only 1.5% of books represent Blacks and this percentage is due to social forces from the civil rights movement imagine the paltry numbers of ethnic groups represented in children's literature, if there are any at all.

According to Campbell, Oda, and Young (1995, p 375) "multicultural literature has a message that is beneficial to all students". One of the best ways to impart understanding and empathy for others is to take a walk in their footsteps. Multicultural literature allows students to take this journey without ever leaving the classroom. Laurence Yep states that in the process of getting to know another's culture, one develops a truer understanding of what it is to be a member of his or her own culture (as cited in Lewis, 1994, p 39).

Another advantage to using multicultural literature in the classroom "is the belief that incorporating multiethnic literature into the curriculum can expand appreciation and decrease negative stereotyping of individuals representing other cultures" (Walker-Dalhouse, 1992, as cited in Barnhart, Cook, and Wham, 1996). According to Campbell et al. (1995, p 383) multicultural literature is frequently used only during specific holidays or months such as Cinco de Mayo or Black History month. In order to be truly effective the literature must be incorporated throughout the daily schedule. Campbell et al. (1995, p 387) also states if teachers do not ensure access to literature in which various cultures are represented in non-stereotypical characterization the teacher is in effect stunting the cultural empathetic growth of the student.

Statement Hypothesis

Guidelines have been developed for the use of multicultural literature within the classroom to increase respect for differences (religious, ethnic, cultural, physical, and gender). Although a great deal of empirical data doesn't exist to prove the validity of using multicultural literature its use is widely accepted. Do students really develop an increased respect for difference when multicultural literature is read within the classroom? With this question in mind an attempt was made to validate the standpoint that multicultural literature used within the classroom does increase respect for differences within kindergarten children.

Sample Description

The sample consisted of twelve students ranging in ages of five to six years of age. Six boys and six girls participated in the study. The ethnic breakdown of the study is as follows, four black students consisting of two girls and two boys, four Hispanic students consisting of two girls and two boys, 2 Asian students consisting of one boy and one girl, and two Caucasian students consisting of one boy and one girl. All except one student was interviewed in English. Other students were included within the study, but one student was ill and didn't return to complete the questionnaire and the other student refused to cooperate. Students were chosen based upon ethnicity (the sample is representative of the ethnic population within the two classrooms) and their willingness to cooperate with the interviewer.

Students surveyed were from two class rooms. The morning kindergarten class being the experimental group and the control group being the afternoon kindergarten class. The differences between the two class rooms are 1) different teachers, 2) the

morning class has a high ratio of limited English proficient students , and 3) a discussion using the book Amazing Grace took place before the actually testing in the morning class. Originally the control group was to have been another kindergarten classroom with a program slightly dissimilar from the morning kindergarten class, but due to scheduling and inaccessibility of the students, the study was conducted with members from the afternoon kindergarten with a similar schedule and access to the same multicultural literature.

Students were interviewed on a one on one basis using a series of ten questions, eight pictures of children within the students' age group that represented both the ethnic and gender breakdown of the study's sample, and five cards of play objects. In response to questions 1-5 and 7-9 students were asked to look at the pictures and chose the picture(s) that would best answer the question. During the actual interview it was never stated how many pictures the students were allowed to chose at one time. Some students chose two individuals for various questions. For question six students were asked "who could play with this toy?" and they were then asked to tell why. Originally students were shown the pictures of the other children as well as the pictures of the play objects. This concept seemed to be too complex and was modified to the previous description.

Prior to interviewing the experimental group, the book Amazing Grace was read to the class. A discussion about how Grace felt being told she couldn't be Peter Pan because she was a Black girl ensued. Students were very excited about the discussion, and the book had to be put away for another day so that they could explore things that could or could not be done based upon gender and ethnicity. Students were very frank in their discussion of what they could be done. For example,

one student felt he could be Superman because he and Superman had the same color skin and eyes. Another student questioned this point by saying she had been Cinderella for Halloween and she had braids in her hair and dark eyes, where as Cinderella had long yellow hair. Using a student as an example the teacher asked if Michael, who is black, could be Superman? The students discussed this back and forth among themselves and finally reached the conclusion that he could be. The discussion was then focused on gender, but not ethnicity.

Results

The findings are somewhat mixed. Obvious ethnic biases were not found. Based upon this finding, yes reading multicultural literature in the classroom does seem to help increase respect for ethnic differences, but gender biases were found instead. However, upon closer inspection there are several conditions that were not taken into consideration by the researcher, 1) age of the students, 2) ethnicity and students relationship to the interviewer, 3) and the wording of the questions themselves.

Students responded to the interviewers questions by choosing pictures of children. During the interview it became evident that some students were just picking children based upon whether or not they were cute. When asked what made a particular child "cute" to a student answers were "I don't know, they're just cute, they have a nice smile, or I want them to be my friend". The young age of the students may have hampered their ability to express their opinions about their choices. Also students at this age may not have been overtly exposed to ethnic stereotypes and therefore lacked a common language to discuss stereotypes. If the sample population had been older maybe they would have had more to say about their choices.

The fact that the interviewer was well known to the students may have had some effect on the type of answers that students gave. For example, question four was "who could be a teacher?". Only eleven students answered the question, out of those eleven students, five chose Black students to be the teacher and eight chose females to be the teacher. Lastly, the wording of the questions only prompted answers of pointing to pictures. When the interviewer asked a student "why" usually several other prompts such as "tell me about that or what makes Marcus cute" were necessary to elicit a response. For the age group being tested maybe the concept or the questions were too difficult.

One important finding from the study was that gender stereotypes definitely need to be worked on in both the morning and afternoon classes. In response to question one, "who would you chose to be your friend" four students chose girls and two chose boys in the control group. On question two, "who could be a police person" five out of six students chose a boy to be the police person in the experimental group where as in the control group the was response 50% to 50%.

All students selected boys or girls equally to be nurses although there was a lean towards having Hispanic nurses. Four out of the six students in the experimental group chose a Hispanic person for the nurse. One student and visited the nurse early in the week for a headache and commented on the questionnaire that "Lupe" could be the nurse "cause she be calling every ones mom when their heads hurt". Our school nurse is Filipino and speaks Spanish, this could be one reason why some students chose "Lupe" as the nurse.

In both the experimental and control groups girls were chosen for the role of

teacher, also the ethnic group most chosen to be a teacher was Black. One student's response to why she chose Lashwn to be a teacher was, "because she is Black and they speak English, and she is like Miss Davis, and she is pretty". This particular student is the only child in the survey who is labeled Limited English Proficient and was the only student in the entire survey to mention race in regards to her answers. Her answers were very focused on speaking English. Questions 2,3,4,5 all focused on occupations and she chose students based on their ability to speak English, with the notable exception of question three. The child in question three was Hispanic and was chosen to be a nurse because she had nice hair.

Most of the students chose either boys or girls to be doctors in question five, however, one student chose both a boy and a girl. Question seven asked "who is smarter?", five out of six students chose boys in the experimental group while five out of six students chose girls in the control group. Most students equated the child's intelligence in the pictures to his/her appearance. Marcus, one of the students in the pictures, was chosen because he was pictured reading a book.

In response to "who gets into a lot of trouble?" eight out of twelve students chose boys. One student chose all four boys pictured for her response. When asked why, she said, "I can tell by their smiles". Both girls and boys were chosen as likely candidates to take things that did not belong to them in question nine.

Question six which had been modified to just showing the students objects of five toys (basketball and hoop, tools, dishes, books, and household cleaning tools) and asking "who could play with this?" displayed that most students have definite ideas about gender play. For the most part the brooms, mops, and dishes were for

girls, while the tools, and basketball were for boys. The books were neutral territory. According to one student, "plates and table are for girls because they like, (looked at interviewer and pointed to herself and the interviewer) you know, tea. And making up parties. Basketball is for boys because girls don't like boys and boys don't like girls". Another student stated that, "tools were only for boys". When asked if girls could play with the tools also, she said, "No. Cause girls don't work. Boys is boys and girls is girls". A student in the experimental group said that, "it was okay for boys and girls to play with dishes as well as read books, but only boys could play basketball and no one could play with the mop and broom because that was for the mom to clean the house with".

The last question on the survey was who is your best friend in class. Students were told that they could choose up to three friends. Students primarily chose playmates that were reflective of their own gender. Only four out of the twelve students surveyed chose one playmate that was not reflective of their own gender. The students who chose at least one different gendered playmate were two boys and two girls. Two of the students were Hispanic, one was Caucasian, and one was Black. The choices that students made didn't seem to be influenced by the students ethnicity or that of their friends.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Longitudinal studies must be conducted to determine if multicultural literature is an effective tool in the fight to increase respect for differences. Another recommendation drawn is that several books in the classroom collection may promote gender stereotypes. For example, the book Too Many Tamales, gives insight into the Mexican American culture, but does so by portraying females in the typical role of housekeeper/maker of the food. Also notably absent from the classroom collection,

are books which portray men in the role of nurturer and also as housekeeper.

A criteria for book selection needs to be developed and implemented within the classroom, district , and state. Libraries must be filled with literature representing all walks of life, cultures, religions, ability levels, and gender roles. Promoting and developing literature that is inclusive of all people should be an important next step for the education community at large to consider.

After reviewing all of the results the interviewer concluded that more work in the area of decreasing gender bias needs to be addressed. Students will also benefit from class discussions about gender roles. Also this particular study needs to be conducted within older students with a larger population sample.

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- 1. Who would you chose to be your friend? Why?**
- 2. Who could be a police person? Why?**
- 3. Who could be a nurse? Why?**
- 4. Who could be a teacher? Why?**
- 5. Who could be a doctor? Why?**
- 6. Who could play with which toy? Why?**
- 7. Who is smarter? Why?**
- 8. Who gets into a lot of trouble? Why?**
- 9. Who would takes things that don't belong to them? Why?**
- 10. Who are you three best friends? Why?**

Response Sheet

Name: _____
Control or Experimental _____
Ethnicity _____
Gender _____
Age _____

1. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why _____

2. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why _____

3. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why _____

4. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why _____

5. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why _____

6. Who can play with which toy and why?

7. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why

8. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why

9. Samuel Ricardo John Marcus Patty Lupe Lashawn Tricia

Why

10. Best friends...

